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CRIMINAL SLANG.

What is slang? Slang, briefly defined, is low, vulgar and unauthorized language; a popular but unauthorized word, phrase or mode of expression; also the jargon of some particular calling or class in society; low popular cant; as the slang of the theater, of colleges, sailors, gypsies, thieves, and various other classes that compose the dregs of society.

Slang had its birth in criminality. Take for example the language of the gypsies and Magyars. The gypsies were a vagabond race whose tribes coming originally from India entered Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries and are now scattered over Turkey, Russia, Hungary, Spain, England and America, living by thefts, horse-jockeying, fortune telling, tinkering and the like. The Magyar race was one of the dominant people of Hungary and was allied to the Turks and the Finns. Those were wandering tribes and their language was intelligible only to the immediate members of each individual tribe; as a class they were decidedly criminal and from their argot we trace the authenticity of ancient criminal slang. Their slang language is the same today as it was in the fourteenth century and is still unscathed by the mutation of time.

The Magyar race of Hungary was in its habits and characteristics much the same as the gypsies; they had criminal tendencies and vagabond habits, and their trades of horse-jockeying, fortune telling and tinkering were merely adjunct to their successful depredations. The language of this class of people especially their criminal jargon and cries of warning has remained unchanged through the march of centuries.

The criminal class of India use warning cries and employ cipher marks to tell subsequent prowlers of the conditions of the neighborhood in regard to safety and in this respect they are similar to our "Yeggmen" of the present day in America, a class whose activities have baffled the keenest minds of the United States Government, and in the suppression of whom as a class the post office inspectors have ignominiously failed.

All over India numerous wandering tribes are to be found like the Bedijas of Bengal; the Nats, Sansijas, and Kanjars of the United Provinces, the Mang, Mahar, or Dhed of the Dec-

can. These tribes practice the usual gipsy industries—mat and basket making, knife grinding and the like. The facility of their occupation makes it an easy cloak for most nefarious practices, as is the case with the European gipsy. Some, like the Gulgulias of Bengal, live by begging and pilfering, and exhibiting trained goats and monkeys. The woman sells drugs to cure ear and tooth ache, and for less reputable purposes. The Koravers, a class of railway thieves of India, are a branch or off-shoot of the Gulgulian tribes of wandering thieves. The Punjab, again, has a tribe of wandering blacksmiths, whose home is their cart, in which they carry about the tools and materials of their craft. There are, again, wandering tribes of tumblers, rope dancers, acrobats, jugglers, and snake charmers. These people speak a variety of thieves' slang, based on one of the dialects of Pakrit, a later tongue allied to Sanskrit.

The gipsy and Magyar tribes lived in seclusion free from any intercourse with the world, and in that respect they differed radically from the modern criminal, who loves society and the pleasures which follow from conventionality and good fellowship.

Modern criminal slang has for its distinguishing features, expressiveness and applicability. It has taken our modern civilization to make the present day criminal and evolve his classic speech. Many of the slang expressions which are in current use among the American criminals of the present day will, because they convey so much truth in a "pat" form, eventually find a place in all the dictionaries. The peculiar language used by the underworld, is to my mind due to their perverted, but acute mentality.

Just as the yeggman finds a burglar's kit and dynamite an essential preparation for blowing open safes, so the criminal finds his own slang a most convenient and useful mode of expression because of its brevity, and its usefulness in conveying so many ideas in a very few words.

The newsboy has his favorite jargon, the race track tout also has his favorite words which are intelligible only to the followers of his cult, the horse jockey has his own peculiar

lingo, in fact each and every class of the criminal world uses its own peculiar dialect, and uses it frequently whenever occasion requires as a mode of conveying its or their own peculiar ideas, thoughts and expressions, and to people not familiar with the habits and customs of the underworld this slang language is absolutely unintelligible and full of mystery.

Perhaps you will ask why the underworld uses a language, possession of which arouses instant suspicion and perhaps immediate detection. The average policeman in all of our large American cities is wholly ignorant of criminal slang and its meaning; he is what the underworld calls a "harness bull," to-wit, an officer in uniform, and the average criminal treats his knowledge with contempt, and well he might because as far as any knowledge of the subject goes he is on a mental "track 13 and a washout."

Let us examine the reasons for the prevailing ignorance of the meaning of criminal slang among police officers, detectives, sheriffs, and other officials entrusted with the enforcement of the criminal laws. In the first place the meeting of thieves and police is naturally a hostile one; the culprit is in fear, and is overawed by the weight of authority. This is not calculated to inspire any confidence or grounds of friendship, because to learn the peculiar argot of criminals one must mix with them socially and become a hail fellow well met, and in this way become familiar with their language and mannerisms. The operation of the third degree and the sweat-box methods are not calculated to kindle warm friendships between the underworld and the members of the police. Then again, the policeman doing patrol duty on the streets of our large cities is dressed in full uniform; and is a marked man and consequently is shunned by all members of the light-fingered fraternity. The plain clothes men have a slightly better opportunity to obtain a knowledge of criminal slang and thief vernacular. If a thief has experienced a "bad fall" (an arrest) he is put to his wits end, and as he is naturally resourceful, he begins at once to get on the right side of the arresting officer. This is where the application of "salve" (getting on the right side of the arresting officer) begins, and by reason of this en-

forced familiarity the inspector might pick up a few words of slang here and there, but the knowledge he gains in this way is never a burden to him. Then again, thieves from different parts of the United States have different dialects and colloquial sayings, and a thief from the Pacific Coast would use a great many words that are wholly unknown to the New York pickpocket. Of course after a "meet" of Western thieves with Eastern thieves an interchange of slang and pat words follows, and one readily picks up the cant words and sayings of the other. Thus the police have no means at hand of acquiring the slang words and cant phrases of the underworld and this is not to be wondered at for the reasons which I have narrated in detail above.

An examination and critical study of criminal slang will, to my mind, prove instructive and entertaining to the reader. We will take for the first illustration the pick-pocket who is called in the slang language "a gun." "A gun" is a thief who does not force, somewhat of a paradox, but nevertheless true, and in this manner he is distinguished from the "Gorilla," the strong arm highwayman, who holds up people on the roadside and relieves them of their valuables.

A "Grafter" is a thief in the language of criminals. This meaning will probably be adopted by honest men and find a place in all the dictionaries. Then too, the term "jail arithmetic" is so applicable to our embezzling bank officers, conscienceless financiers, and swindling contracts, or "*et id omne genus*," that it deserves a place in our literature. That criminals consider all persons holding office under political government "Political Paupers" should merit the attention of Civil Service Commissions.

A complaint or charge of crime is a "rap," and the complainant is the "rapper."

The one whose property is stolen is the "sucker" and the judge is called a "beak."

A "fall" is an arrest and "fall money" is the money which used to liberate a man from custody. To "spring a man" is to bail one out who is under arrest, and to help square the

"sucker" and get a man off clear from any charge of crime the "underground wires" must be used.

A pocket-book is a "Poke" and a man who jumps his bail-bonds, becoming a fugitive from justice is a "Lamaster."

The thief who steals your pocket-book is the "wire" or "tool" and a gang of pick-pockets consisting of three or more people who travel together to steal is called a "mob."

A "swell mob" is a gang of first class pick-pockets who can hire first class legal talent and have good financial backing.

When a man is convicted of crime he is "settled" or to give the English slang phrase "unfortunate."

If a girl should lose her fellow through a court sentence she is "divorced" in the language of the underworld.

A "swell mouth piece" is a very good lawyer, while a very bad one is called a "shyster."

A pick-pocket is frequently called a "dip" and in Western States a "cannon."

A shoplifter is called a "booster" or "hoister" or "hyster," and an exceptionally smart one a "swell booster." A green goods man when plying his trade is said to be "out on the spud." Store thieves who steal jewelry are called "penny-weighters," while thieves who tap store tills are called "damper getters," and when working are said to be "out on the Heel."

Thieves who steal diamonds or other precious stones from the person are called "prop getters" or "stone getters." A woman thief is called a "gun-moll," and a male thief who makes a specialty of robbing women is called a "moll-buzzer."

A safe blower is called a gopher man, Peter man, or yegg-man and "Gerver" and an empty safe is called a "Bloomer."

A second-story worker who breaks and enters dwelling houses is called a "houseman," "porch climber" and "flat worker."

"Turn out" is to discharge from arrest and put a man on the street.

A woman who decoys men and then her accomplice (alleged husband). blackmails them is called a "badger-worker" or "panel-worker."

The go-between of lobbyists who buys up legislators is called the "gravel-train" because he has the rocks whereby he can debauch legislators and the lobbyist himself is known to the criminal world as a "dress suit burglar."

The thief who robs drunks is called a "lush toucher" and the stylish hotel beat is called a "baron."

A lodging house is a "Doss-house" and to sleep is to "Doss." A restaurant is a "dump" or "beanery" and a convict who works the churches and is insincere in his profession of religion is called a "mission stiff." A minister is called a sky-pilot" and a Catholic priest is called a "galway" or "buck."

A prison keeper or turnkey is called a "screw" and prison food is called "steamed grub."

"Mugged" is photographed and "stood-up" is to be placed in the line of police headquarters for identification and exposed to the gaze of probable "rappers."

An Irish Club house is a "police station" and an "ink-pot" is a resort for low characters.

A "thimble and turnip" is a watch and counterfeit money is "bad dough."

Diamonds with flaws are called "Bum Rocks" and a "fixer" is a man who looks after the interests of the man who is arrested, squares the sucker, hires the lawyer and attends to all necessary details.

A chief of police is a "buzzard" or mean person and a "good fellow" is a thief, man or woman who pay their bills.

A "prison stool pigeon" is a "trusty," "psalm singer" or "pig," and "stick" and "slug" means "keep together and fight."

"Slinging the lingo" is to hold a conversation in slang, while a "mush" is an umbrella and "wipe" is a handkerchief.

"Track 13" and "washout" is a life sentence in a Western penitentiary and "Salt Creek" means death in the electric chair. A "meet" is an appointment, a date, a place where thieves can see each other.

"Anchor" is a stay of execution of sentence and a "life-boat" is a pardon.

"Making the boast" is getting by the pardon board and obtaining a pardon.

"Shake down" is paying for police protection against your will, and a "dead criminal" is one who has become discouraged, reformed or given up grafting.

"Rat" is a cheap thief who squeals on "fall money" and refuses to pay his bills.

"White line" is an alcohol drinker, while a cocaine fiend uses "burnese" a preparation for snuffing through the nostrils. "Dope" is opium or picking winners from past performance. "To job a man" is to convict him with perjured testimony.

I could go on and give hundreds of other specimens of criminal slang, but I think the examples given above will suffice. The vocabulary of criminal slang is large, interesting and expressive, and withal it reeks with good-natured humor.

When the Angel Gabriel shall blow his trumpet and summon us all to that court of infinite justice and mercy, there we shall find a fair judge, no irate rapper, no perjured testimony, and there many, many of the judgments of this world shall be reversed, thus insuring to many of the unfortunate described above a "turn-out" into the Elysian Fields.

Today on all sides we hear the slang of the deft, furtive pickpocket on "dips," the vocabulary of the "yegg," of the "boosters," the confidence-man, the counterfeiter; of every class and kind of criminal which is today operating in America.

And this subject, be it said in passing, is by no means one to be summarily dismissed. Slang is too big, too vital, too much a part of language (and a living part) for us to ignore it. Words scribbled in the margin of life's page, some of which survive and creep into the text. Such is slang. Its origins have always mystified the savant and its use amused the ordinary mortal. Learned societies are today puzzling their wits over the "Jobelin" of Villon, trying in vain to decipher what that prince of crooks meant by some of his astonishing rhymes, and many of his meanings are today utterly

unknown. The study of criminal slang will surprise you with its wealth of information, its accuracy, its humor, its live human interest and appeal.

Victor Hugo thought criminal slang worthy of a chapter in "*Les Misérables*." Every earnest investigator of the underworld agrees with him. This subterranean dialect, obscure, ingenious, wonderfully Groighant, which passes muster everywhere as a "*lingue frenca*" among criminals, is surely worth more than a casual study.

To everybody the subject appeals as interesting. But to whom must it appeal as absolutely essential for the understanding and pursuit of this profession? The philologist should like to have this information, although he can remain efficient without it. The sociologist, the writers, the business man. All these and many other classes, would find criminal slang better reading than most novels; yet, frankly, the subject is not vital to them. But to certain classes it is vital. Concerning it there reigns a most astonishing degree of ignorance among the people who ought to be in duty bound to understand it—I mean all detectives, policemen, lawyers (in short), all, perhaps, in any way whatsoever connected with the administration of justice. Crooks can converse at will in the presence of the police, or can write to each other without at all divulging to the uninitiated their meaning, which meaning it is more often than not most necessary for the police or the authorities to understand. Justice might less often miscarry, were the subject thoroughly and generally understood.

John P. McNichols, S. J., writing in America, says, "there is no gainsaying that much of American slang is picturesque; neither can it be denied that it is often a very effective method of expression. In saying this, I am merely quoting the opinion of a very distinguished Englishman who, some years back, paid a prolonged visit to the States. Unhappily, the efficiency of American slang is shortlived. The slang term, which covers a multitude of ideas today, tomorrow is expressive of nothing. A slang term is usually not a permanent addition to vocabulary. Its efficiency is frequently due to its blanket quality, which does not contribute to that precision of expression which is essential in correctness of speech."

These remarks apply with full force to ordinary slang which appears for a short time and rapidly disappears from our language. But it has no application whatever to criminal slang. Take the word "grafter" for example; when I was a boy it referred to the process of engrafting fruit trees; it still has that meaning, but its widely accepted meaning is today its criminal definition, namely, "a crook, a criminal." There are criminal slang words used today by criminals which were used both in the United States and Great Britain over fifty years ago; their meaning has not changed, and thieves use the same expressions that their "pals" used half a century ago. Criminal slang has made permanent additions to our vocabulary and language.

JOSEPH MATTHEW SULLIVAN, in *American Law Review*.